The Black Cat

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The Black Cat

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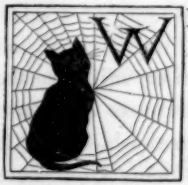
The House Across the Way.

BY LEO GALE.



WHEN I answered the advertisement of the man in whose employ I am now earning my daily bread, I said that I was "a young man twenty-seven years old, single, experienced in the haberdashery and perfumery lines, willing and obliging, and very desirous of obtaining employment." That was the exact truth, particularly the last part; as I was then down to my last ten dollars, without a resource outside of my own humble labors, and not a friend or a single relative in the world to help me, or to put forward one dollar to pay for my room rent, or my modest two and a quarter meals a day; or to buy me the one suit of clothes I usually wore in a year, or the two pairs of shoes, and the few other things which I obtained by laboring steadily from ten to fifteen hours daily, almost three hundred and sixty-five days in the year.

So you know what I am. However persistently some of my fellow-salesmen may assume the manners and appearance of bankers and bondholders, I personally was, and am, a very humble young man, who knows himself pretty well, and, as a result of a long introspection, has settled down to be everlastingly content with enough to eat, drink, and wear, and a bed to sleep in, with a roof over it. Romance has never had a place in

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my life, and sentimentalism is a word devoid of any meaning for me. Only when a boy do I remember reading or hearing anything beyond the bare facts of life, daily labor, debts, troubles, and half-filled stomachs, and a few day dreams, — not mine, but other young men's.

I never thought that I should play a part in, or be a witness of, a life drama or tragedy, or ever hear of one (I mean right close up to myself), or see the sequel of one, or anything of that kind. But I did. And when I think of it now, it makes me creep; for what I saw, others will some day see, and when it is discovered there will be quite a stir in the papers. The stir may not last long, but it will be talked of as a really strange, uncanny sort of thing. And so it is. Not absolutely frightful, but just simply very, very strange.

Before I obtained the position I at present occupy, I rented a small front hall room in a very quiet, respectable street. This street is situated between two avenues that lie east of Eighth Avenue and west of Lexington, and is between Twenty-third and Forty-second Streets. That is as nearly as I can or will describe it. This street was, as I said, respectable, and so was the house (though the house was the least pretentious in the block). It was a street that has that peculiarity of a great many New York streets: some houses were old, some were new, some extremely modest, bordering on shabbiness; others quite attractive, of brown stone, and tenanted by people comfortably if not well off.

The room of which I was the quiet, silent occupant was one that needs no description to the man or woman who knows anything of city boarding-house life. It was on the third floor, overlooked the street, and was just over the stoop. I won't stop to tell everything that was in it, for that is not my purpose here. I came every night and went every morning; at seven o'clock every morning, generally at eight or nine every night. When I got home I generally stayed right in my room, retiring at ten or eleven regularly. I had no money to spend, and so was, perforce, a very regular, good young man — for I also went to church every Sunday morning, and sometimes Sunday night. I used often to gaze out of my window at the people passing by, particularly during the long Sunday afternoons when it was raining or

cloudy, and everything seemed very quiet, somber, cold, and puritanical. It was not much of an entertainment, but it was all I had. There was one thing, however, that occasionally made my street gazing interesting, and that was the coming and going of a very smart-looking young man who was, it was reported to us less favored "roomers," the son of the owner of the house just opposite — a man who had made quite a fortune in the produce business, and was now retired. You must understand that we had some quite rich neighbors, for this street, being near a large center, had some solid householders, and a few stylish boarding-houses further up the street, besides the modest ones of which I was a patron.

This young man I speak of was evidently a favored son. He did nothing but go out in the morning at from ten to twelve, and many times I had been awakened by the noisy stopping of his cab at all hours of the night. He was a "blood" beyond a doubt, and the envy of many of us who gathered at the dining-table and discussed this young child of fortune's escapades. For some of us came closer to him during odd moments of the day, when he perhaps came into some store where one of us was employed, or when we met him face to face, or passed him in a carriage on some of the avenues. Sometimes he had male or female companions, always of the flashy kind.

Well, life jogged along for me in the same dull, dry way for some years. I earned the same salary, ate the same sort of food, wore the same sort of clothes, and lived the same sort of life as I had always done and hoped always to do. At some time or other — when, I cannot place exactly — the young man disappeared, and, in a way that excited no special comment, so did the young man's people. The house was either sold or rented; a new tenant came and opened a boarding-house, failed and moved out; another one took it, and in time went away; so also did a third and a fourth. Just then our landlady died, and somehow I moved across the street, right into the very house where the young man had lived, but now so long ago that he was but a memory; and as nearly all his contemporaries in my former quarters had scattered, I never heard him spoken of, nor spoke of him myself.

The room which my small income permitted was a hall room,

on the third floor front, exactly like the one across the street, only just a little bit larger. I settled down in it uneventfully, and so continued to live. The only thing which lent a ray of light to my existence here was the coming of a middle-aged gentleman (and he was a gentleman), who took the small room at the other end of the rather long, narrow hallway, so that when our doors were opened each could see the other sitting in his little den, and could engage in conversation if he cared to talk loudly. But for the sake of the other lodgers we never did, though we exchanged visits frequently on the long winter evenings. This was a good thing for both of us, for he was poor and alone in the world, and so was I, and our acquaintance brought us much mutual entertainment.

Our rooms were not elegant, nor was any part of the house — now. It did contain some evidence of former luxury, but such evidence was very scarce and seedy, and fast disappearing. Besides the rooms we occupied, there was a closet here and there along the hall, and two large square rooms that were let to richer lodgers; though, on account of the narrow stairs and the gloomy aspect that characterized this landing, these more expensive rooms were more often empty than not. Often I sauntered in and out of them, side by side with my fellow-lodger, talking of various things. We sat down on the sofas and chairs, and sometimes lighted the gas, for we were quite alone up here, and being quiet, never gave any trouble, or called forth any reprimands. A great many others came and went in all parts of the house, some staying a week, some a month, some only a few days; but we two were like fixtures — not very profitable, but desirable in a way.

Between our two rooms, on one side of the hall, was a closet just outside of my door, the baluster, then the top step of the staircase, another closet door, and at the end of the hall my friend's room. On the other side of the hall were the doors of the two large rooms, and between them a blank space of wall.

Now I know there is nothing very interesting about a third-story landing of an old house, nor anything special to be said about the wall outside of two rooms; but many a time I have walked up and down this hallway on Sunday afternoons or even-

ings when alone, making no noise and gazing at this wall with its gilt paper,— of which I knew every figure, and how many figures there were,— and at the little skylight overhead, or at the faded red carpet on the floor. I often went into the front room, lighted the gas, and wandered around from object to object, sat first in one chair, then in another, then in the rocker, and lastly pulled the folding bed down, simply for something to do, or to speculate how nice it would be to sleep in this bed instead of my own. But I could not conceive of such extravagance for any other than a married man. I would go, also, into the little wash-closet, where there was a basin and running water, and a cupboard overhead, or into the clothes-closet just next to it, both doors of which faced the front windows. Then I would go into the other large room, at the other end of the hall, and perhaps do just the same thing. I often borrowed an easy chair from one of the rooms; but more often I would sit in one of them, preferably the front, and pass whole evenings reading, with my back to the window, at ease in the large rocker, and with the light falling over my shoulder onto the book I was reading. Thus my face was towards the two closets at the other side of the room, and as the doors often stood open, I could, and often did, sit gazing at the blank walls; and for lack of anything better to do, often laid down my book and just sat and stared. A blank mind, you will say. That's true. Outside of my daily labors, there was nothing much else in the world for me, or in me for myself. So I found entertainment simply in staring at a blank wall.

In my many goings and comings into these two large rooms I had often and often done the same thing. I was, perhaps, in these rooms, either sitting down or talking to my friend, as often as three or four nights in seven. He, too, did exactly as I did — stared and stared, or talked, read, or walked, and stared again at the wall of these inside closets. I had often remarked that there were generally doors in such houses connecting the front and rear rooms. I said so to my friend, but he just nodded. Of course it didn't interest him, or me, either, very much just then, and people who are idle often say things of no importance. Time passed on in a humdrum way, and while I repeatedly went into the rooms, the temporary occupancy of either or both, from time

to time, quite naturally put more important things uppermost in my mind.

For a long time, then, the rooms were both occupied. At least it seemed a long time, for nobody cared to stay in them more than a week or a month. While they were let I had no opportunity to go into them, but simply minded my own business, only calling on my friend, and nodding whenever I met the newcomers, who seemed to be men of no very interesting or attractive stamp. At last they went, — first one, then the other, — and we were again alone on our third-story landing, and able to indulge in the same inexpensive habit of whiling away time in the large rooms. One night, when I was the only one on the floor, and the rain was beating a soft tattoo — sweet to a lonely man — on the roof and skylight, I was taking my favorite promenade from my own room through the hall and into the room of my friend, which I always entered at will. I was stepping out with long strides, my head bowed down between my shoulders, my hands in my pockets, and my shoulders humped high over my chest, in schoolboy fashion, from sheer idleness and laziness; and while I walked back and forth I was saying to myself under my breath: "La, la, la, lum, tum, tum, la, la, um, bum, la, la, lum." I did this two or three times. Quite naturally I continued: "Ah, ah, la, la, one, two, three, four, one, two, three;" and so on, indefinitely and quite foolishly. Others have done the same, I am sure, out of pure listlessness. So I went on walking up and down, in and out of the two small rooms and the two large rooms, thinking of nothing, and now and then counting from one up to twenty, or any number, till my fancy commenced again on "lum, lum, tum." On one of these trips I began to count, "One, two, three, four," and so forth, still out of pure idleness and not with any intention of pacing off the depth of the house, which, however, I did unwittingly. Starting from the window of my room, I counted twenty-two to the window of the small rear room. At the time I made but slight note of this, but on going back I noticed that I counted again up to twenty-two exactly. That was as far as it went. I counted twenty-two from front to rear wall of the house. That was all. Then, after a little while, I went to bed. Some other matters coming up, I was not again at liberty to do any

more pacing off or other idle nonsense for a week or more. Then, as I happened to think of measuring off the two large rooms in order to compare their size with my own, I paced from the front window of the front square room to the closet doors. I measured first six paces, then, going back, seven, then once more I made it six and a half, and at last about eight regular paces of two and a half feet long. Now I cannot be sure as to these little details, as I was not doing it with any purpose, but only for pastime. After measuring off my own room, I went back to the large rear room and measured that.

I was becoming interested.

I counted eight paces. Eight? Yes, eight. No, it couldn't be. I tried again. Seven, seven and a half. Seven, then eight, then eight again. I knew it must be about eight, at all events. Eight and eight were sixteen. I saw that this disparity was absurd, but presently it occurred to me that the wash-closet accounted for the very apparent difference; only the closet, which I had not taken into account, could not be more than one pace in depth, making seventeen. And I had counted twenty-two that night in the hall. But perhaps I had taken larger steps to-night. I determined to try again. Once more I paced off the hall — twenty-two!

Naturally, I was very much perplexed, but as I was not of a very deep or romantic nature, nothing suggested itself to my mind, except that the architect who had planned this house, perhaps twenty-five or more years before, had made some strange calculations, and wasted much valuable space between two rooms. That night I certainly did not think of one thing that was not perfectly commonplace and sensible.

It turned out, however, that I often thought of this problem on the many subsequent occasions when sitting in that front room; and one night, when my usually slow mind was troubled with some unusually fanciful notions concerning the black space of at least ten feet between these two rooms, I decided to bring home a long builder's tape measure from the store the next evening. For what purpose or with what end in view, I did not stop to analyze. I was just curious and mystified. The next night I somehow got upstairs with alacrity, and as luckily no one was

around, I fell to at once, and began measuring off the front room from the front windows to the closet doors. The exact depth to the door-sill was twenty-one feet, six inches, and from the door-sill of the wash-closet to the wall, a little under two feet. Then I went into the rear room, and found that the depth from the window to the wall was nearly nineteen feet. I next went out into the hall, and again opening both doors, found the depth of the house from the inside to be about fifty-four feet. Here it seemed to me that I must be mistaken. I could not understand the curious disparity. My head seemed to be made of wood. Had I been quick-witted, I should at once have seen that, allowing for all sorts of thick and thin partitions, there were at least ten or eleven feet unaccounted for between the front and rear rooms of this third-story landing. As it was, nothing of the sort suggested itself to my mind. Indeed, I had done well to get as far as I did, considering that I had not started out with any strange ideas, or with the hope of unearthing any mystery.

For a long time I stood in the hallway, holding the tape in my hand, biting my lip, and trying to think what it all could mean. Certainly there was something out of the way. Even supposing that I was quite mistaken in some of my measurements, in consequence of a general inability to do more than a few things well, I could not have been more than two or three feet astray. But what that something was, it was quite beyond me to imagine; though I did put my hand on the wall, and look up and down, and feel of it from end to end, but rather aimlessly, and with a sort of stupid wonder. "What's in there?" I asked myself. But I got no answer. Mine was not a fertile brain. So barren was it, that I did not at the time feel the least sensation beyond a dull curiosity and perplexity. After wandering round a bit without much purpose, and attempting to read a book, I went into my room, shut the door, and sat down, and fell asleep in my chair.

About this time my friend in the back room was often obliged to work late nights at his place of business, and in consequence I was left alone more than usual. Had it not been for this, I should probably never have done much thinking regarding the matter of the queer measurements of this floor and its spaces, apparent and

invisible. But often, when I sat alone in the large front room, looking into the closet at the blank wall, I would think, What's there? Who built such a funny house? And can it be a large well hole that takes up so much of this unexplained space? I thought over these things something like five nights, during which the subject forced itself on my mind with growing persistency, before it occurred to me to go up on the roof and see. This I did, forcing and fighting my way up through an ill-smelling, black, cobwebby scuttle that had probably not been opened in the memory of the lessee of the house, fearful of making a noise, a little bit scared by the lonesomeness of my situation, and not knowing, either, what I might come face to face with on my way.

At last I succeeded in prying the scuttle cover up, and not very spryly got out on the old gravel roof. The night was black. For a few moments I could not see an inch before me, but as my eyes became used to the darkness, the bare outlines of things were visible, and I groped my way to where I thought the room should lie; then, getting down upon my hands and knees, I crept from front to rear wall, feeling every foot of the way, lest I should plunge down into some terrible place from which there would be no escape. I went along slowly, feeling quite vexed with myself for having forgotten even a match; but I found nothing but a straight, plain roof — that is to say, my hand found nothing, for I could barely see. Accordingly, I wasted little time on the roof, but soon returned to my room, quite chilled, and feeling that I had very nearly made a fool of myself. So I concluded to put the matter from my mind once for all.

For two weeks I succeeded. Then I began to think of it again, at first a little bit, then more and more, till out of business hours I could think of nothing else. Finally, I concluded that as I could not walk through the wall at will to investigate, the best thing I could do was to go up on the roof again, with a lantern, and examine its surface once more, this time carefully. I felt loth to spend any money on a lantern, but after a day of stubbornness, finally gave in, and one night brought one home. That night, however, my friend was at home, though, in answer to my somewhat impatient inquiry, he said that he should spend the

next evening at his place of business. On the following evening I was at the foot of the ladder leading to the roof at eight o'clock, or as soon as it was dark. I might have waited for Sunday to come, but as that was five days off, and as my friend would be at home to ask questions all that day, I had made up my mind to try now or not at all. So I went up, opened the cover, this time a little more easily, and crawled out on the pebbles that covered the entire roof. I then lighted my lantern, — which was what is called a "dark" lantern, and illumined only such spots as I wished to examine, — and dropped upon my hands and knees as before. I began at the front, creeping along slowly, but knowing that ten minutes at most would suffice me, I did not fear being discovered; and as I was quite eager to see what I myself might discover, I was lost to all other things and went on slowly and carefully. I remember that when I judged I must be over that dark, empty space below, something like a thrill ran through me at the thought of what might be underneath; and then, when suddenly my hand ran against an obstruction, I thrilled again with the thought that at last I had found a clue to the mystery. It was a rim of wood, which might readily be passed over if not looked at closely, and it extended around, with square corners, like nothing so much as the sheathing at the sides of a scuttle-hole, which overtops the roof generally by an inch or so. Had there been a scuttle-hole here? And to what did it lead? What did it ventilate? But I could not be sure that there had been a scuttle-hole; only the outline of the hole was there; still, roofers do not usually put four strips of wood, meeting at right angles, in any part of a gravel roof to amuse themselves. I began to think of things with a facility that surprised me, and spoke of a latent pertinacity of which I had always myself been ignorant. But however much I might speculate on the why and the wherefore of what I had found, it was no explanation, and would have amounted to nothing if the theory of the scuttle-hole had not presented itself. In spite of a careful search, I found nothing else, and after a little while went down. Fortunately, no one was a witness of my ascent or descent.

After that I could not get the matter out of my thoughts. With that newly awakened hunger for the unusual which some-

times comes to a man whose life has been wofully void of incident, I began to feast upon speculations and imaginings — a truly childish pastime, I know. But I never was a great man. And so I kept thinking of it, night after night; alone, or sitting with my friend in his room, talking of little things, or discussing things in the papers, like little people who have nothing to do with big events. I couldn't read now at all. Whenever I made the attempt at my old place, my back to the light that burned right by the window of the empty room, and my face towards the open closets, invariably my eyes would rest on the wall, and for whole minutes I would thus sit without uttering a word. My companion remarked this once or twice and looked at me curiously — but he had no notion of my thoughts, as I never spoke about the matter to him.

It did not occur to me for a long while; indeed, it did not seem possible until I had thought it over, and over, and over, — to destroy another's property at first seemed unpardonable, — but I did at last determine to make a hole in the wall. Now, you must know that up to that time I had no reason for thinking that the state of affairs which I had discovered was different from that which might exist in any old house, or in any of the houses in this row; for which reason it can easily be understood that a man of my nature, unresourceful, and inclined to hold back in anything savoring of an enterprise, might move slowly in such a matter. Had I had anything else to do or think of at the time, I certainly should never have made another move in the matter. But I did at last reach the point where I resolved to make a hole in the wall; first, only a long, very narrow one, such as I could make with a long bell-hanger's gimlet, which had been left lying in the cellar under the store where I was employed. Then I could make another, or three or four, and if I found nothing then, I did not know what I might do. I did not even form the least idea of what I might find. I did, however, procure the gimlet at once, and at the first opportunity set to work. At night, when I commenced to bore, I had never once thought of seeing anything more than a few pieces of plaster drop, or of meeting anything except some hard obstruction, such as a joist or brick. I did see the plaster drop, and so much more than I had calculated that, had it

been out in the room itself, I should have stopped at once; but as the little closet was dark, I felt that a hole even two or three inches wide would not hurt anything, and so kept on. How far I should have to go in I could not tell. At first only the plaster fell. Then I struck something that seemed to be a lath, but which I got through easily. My gimlet plunged forward without meeting anything — and stopped. I had still about six inches of it to spare, and began to turn. I seemed to be boring into wood, though I was not certain, and kept on twisting round and round, when suddenly the gimlet plunged in again and I knew I had passed through something more. I drew it out slowly and without any skill, but I only heard some scraps of plaster fall inside and was no wiser than before. Then for about five minutes I rested, disappointed, but somehow half relieved at finding a plain, matter-of-fact, honest wall. I did not know whether to go on or not. Should I continue my foolish quest, I asked myself, or should I go away and cease to destroy the property of others? I did not much care then what I did. But after awhile I decided to make just one more little hole beside the other, or about half an inch away from it, and then, if I found I was only making a fool of myself, to give the whole thing up, tell no one about it, and forget it altogether. As I made this second hole, I saw that the plaster fell out quite plentifully till the two holes were about united. It seemed, too, from the way the gimlet acted, as if I had just struck about or near to the hole I had previously made in the lath within. Had I been calculating to enlarge the hole quickly, I could not have done it better. But as the gimlet filled up most of the space, I could only guess at the path it was making through whatever was within, though I fancied that it was penetrating just the same substances as it had before. When it had gone its entire length, and I started to pull it back, I found it was stuck in something, and so moved it about violently, jerking and twisting it impatiently to get it out. At the same time I heard much plaster fall, and a creaking and scraping, as when rats run up and down wildly inside the walls. At last I jerked the gimlet out, and — it fell to the floor with a loud clang, for I had dropped it in the first thoughtless impulse of profound amazement. There, — right in front of my eyes, — streaming out

into the darkness of this little closet, was a thin but steady ray of light, just like a bar of gold, distinct and as unmistakably a fact as my own existence. I could only stand gazing at it as rigid as a corpse, for I was incapable of motion. It was there — I saw it — a steady, clear ray of light. From where did it come? I did not know, I was lost to everything but that one fact — that a light was streaming out into the closet from a place which no one knew existed. Then I came to myself with a shudder, and, after making at least twenty attempts and as often falling back with fear, I brought myself up to the hole and looked within. At the first moment I started back, my hands flung backward up over my head in an attitude of extreme terror. My face must at that moment have been absolutely livid.

A thrill of intense and sickening horror tingled at the roots of my hair, till it seemed as if it stood up on my head; and at the same time I felt as if an electric shock ran down my spine, through my whole body, rooting me like iron to the floor. I felt my eyes bulging from their sockets. I could not, at that moment, have moved for all the wealth of the world, and if my tongue had not been paralyzed, like my entire body, I should have shrieked madly. For within the brilliantly lighted room on which I looked, in a large armchair close by the table, there sat, rigid, and white, and terrible, a man whose black, open, and staring eyes were fixed directly on me with horrible intensity. By his side, on a table, lay a shining pistol, and on his forehead was a spot of blood that told the tale of self-destruction. At that moment, one thought, one mad desire,— to be away from that spot, anywhere so that I might escape from the awful situation into which my curiosity had led me,—came to me with such force as to sicken me. Had I been able to move hand or foot, I should have fled away, out of the house, to escape from those starting, lifelike eyes of this corpse, with which I was alone in this silent, gloomy place, with only a partition between us, but no bar to save me from the silent, deadly horror that came through the opening I had rashly made, — the opening that once seemed so narrow, but now all too wide, — while we gazed, one at the other, the awful dead and I. The rigidness that terror lent to me at last gave way, and I fell prone to the floor, unconscious.

At length I came to, slowly, but not with any feeling of courage. There was the light above my head, and I knew that within — I scrambled up, and half walked, half stumbled, out of the room and closed the door after me. Then I seized my hat and coat, and, with only one side glance at the innocent-looking wall in the hallway, left the house and hurried out to the street. Here a feeling of relief came to me with the presence of my fellow-men, and with the noises, and lights, and the busy rush of life. How glad I felt to be alive, here, out in the open streets, where every one was happy in the fact of being alive. Yet even now I shuddered when I thought of that light, and that inner room, which no one had dreamed of, and of its ghastly tenant, dead in the midst of life, alone in his strange mausoleum.

But I had to return. Only I decided to wait for my friend, as I should not dare to even go up to my own room alone. So I went back to the street where I lived, and walked up and down from one avenue to another till he should come. I had a long wait, but he came at last, and together we went upstairs. He went into his room, and I followed him and took a seat.

The usual greetings were passed, and the same inquiries as to the day's business on his part or mine. I sat silent, and with difficulty repressed shivers of fear. I wondered what he would say if he knew what lay so near him. I could not tell him then — not at once. I was trembling too much, though I controlled it enough to escape notice. I let him talk on in his pleasant, courteous way. So far I did not know what I should do. I was resolved not to go back into that room again alone, and I knew that I could not go into my own room and sleep. I was on the point of asking him to let me sleep that night with him; but what sense I had left told me that such a request would seem to him ridiculous. But what was I to do? Why not tell him? I was not going to patch up the wall again and leave the mystery within forever. My queer way and occasional shiver, and the expression that must have been in my eyes, at last caused him to ask me if I were not well. He noticed my pale face and mentioned it. I could only stare at him. The horror of it all seemed again to come over me. My teeth chattered. I had jumped up from my chair; but he forced me into it again, asking me if he

could do anything for me. "For, Mr. Jones," he said, "you look like a very sick man."

"I am sick," I said. "Oh, heaven, if you — " That was all I could get out then, and I sat silent for some moments, while he (his name was Flemming) was too polite to ask further as to a matter which I must have appeared to him desirous of saying nothing about. He did not know that I was simply overcome and almost too weak to talk. At last, however, I fully made up my mind, and, gathering all the strength I could, in broken, disconnected sentences I told him all — or not all, but at least the outline of the thing. He simply sat still and stiff in his chair. When I had finished he said not a word, but just sat as still as ever, looking at me in silence, till his eyes seemed so like those others, that I sprang up, crying, "Don't — don't look at me that way — I can't stand it. I am not a brave young man. You look like — like him!"

He at least was braver than I. Recovering himself, he got up, and putting his hand on my shoulder said: "Jones, it is all strange — very strange — but possible. It is one of those things that happen now and then. Come, let us look; I want to see for myself. Then, when we come back here, I'll tell you what I know about it."

"What you know?" I stammered, almost shrieked.

"Yes, what I know," he answered. "Come on. I'll make it all clear, — only," he added, "I did not know as much about this as you have accidentally found out. For the present, come and let us see what is to be seen. It is only a dead man, — under rather unusual circumstances, to be sure. But it is only the circumstances that give horror to it. The fact itself is simple enough. Suicide? Yes, that is bad — but come."

How I trembled, even with him! And he seemed so strong and fearless. I had not got over the shock yet. We went into the front room. The light was yet burning as I had left it, and there the same narrow stream of light was falling through the hole I had made, cutting through the shadow of the closet. I watched him as he stood face to face with the hole in the wall, while he stopped about two feet away from it for a few moments. But he waited only a short time before putting his eye to the hole;

as he did so, I saw a shudder pass through him, and noticed that he clenched his hands; I also heard his teeth meet, and heard him say to himself, "Yes — it is too true. It is Albert."

It is hard to describe the effect these words produced on me, implying, as they did, a knowledge of things on my friend's part of which I had never even faintly dreamed. They relieved me a great deal, too, and for the first time I began to feel coming into my mind a practical realization of the entire circumstance; that is to say, as far as it related to the fact of a dead man being here before us, and nothing more unnatural. But I did not cease to realize and to feel the awful strangeness of his death, and the situation in which we found him, closed in this inner secret room, more solemn than a tomb, within a few feet of living men and unknown to all the world. My companion must have stood motionless, his gaze fixed, fascinated, on the things he saw through that hole, for a long time. It gave me a chance to assume a little courage; so that by the time he moved back, I was ready to look a second, this time to note all those other things which I had overlooked in my first great fear. But however strong I had thought myself, I was speechless, and involuntarily started back on beholding those intently fixed eyes, which again penetrated me, and at seeing that awful death's head, straight and erect above the rigid body; beneath it the white shirt bosom, — for the figure was clad in full evening dress, — and glistening on one finger a large and brilliant diamond, which seemed to me but to add to the grewsomeness of the picture. The first shock over, I looked around the room as much as the size of the hole would allow, or a space of about five square feet. In the center was the silent corpse, which had sat there — for how long, who could say? By his side was a table, and on it the shining weapon which had done the work of destruction. One hand rested on the knees, the other hung by the side of the chair. I could see the foot of a bed, and also the end or side of a splendid counterpane. Also I could catch a sight of a rich carpet at the far corner of the room, and part of a walnut dresser. And strangest of all, above the head of the man, the gas burned brightly and steadily, with just that little occasional flicker when the air passes through it out of the pipe. It was so strange, so passing

strange, that I, too, looked and looked, not able to move away from the secrets of this hidden room, which Fate had given up, with its awful tenant, once more to the sight of men.

When I did draw away, after turning again and again to take a last look, we both gazed at each other a long while without speaking. What could we say? Astonishment was still in possession of our senses, and what words were to follow between us had not yet come to our lips. Silently we again looked, first one, then the other; then again and again, while the stillness was unbroken by the least sound throughout the house. Only the corpse sat there, while the gas burned over his head, and we, at the other side of the little hole in the wall, stared repeatedly at the man within as long as we could endure the fixed regard of his eyes. At last we both moved away. But my friend, bethinking himself that others might discover the mystery, went back. I saw him take up some pieces of plaster, and, after wetting them in the wash-closet just by, place them again in the hole. He then went into his own room (I following closely after) and brought back with him a bottle of mucilage. With this he fixed and patched the broken wall paper over the crack again, using some pieces of matches to fill the chinks in the plaster, till the hole was entirely closed up and concealed.

"This is only temporary," he said to me. "To-morrow I am going to close this up better, and I am going to hire this room before I leave the house in the morning, and lock the door after me. No one must know but you and I. Now, will you come into my room? I want to tell you something."

If he had thought I meant to leave him for an instant that night, he was mistaken. I meant to stay with him on some pretext or other till morning, when I could think of some plan of being with him, or some companion, every night, or of getting out of the house entirely. I did think this last idea the best, and was already planning how to escape the result of what I had brought on myself. Meantime, I went with him to his room after he had locked the door of the large front room, putting the key in his pocket, and after I had closed the door of my own room. I certainly intended to cling to him closely, and so, after sitting down, I shut the door at his request, and looked at him. He took his

time, however, though I could see his face was white. I think he was trying to gather himself together, because his hand shook, and his face wore a very grave expression, and he walked back and forth a few steps for some moments nervously. At last he sat down and, looking straight at me, said: "I know that young man in there. His name is, or was, Albert Clements. His father once owned this house, and lived here with his wife and that boy. There were no others, the other children having died —"

A light had been stealing upon me. The memory of a face I once knew so well, from seeing it so often, came before me.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, "I knew him too — at least by sight. Why, it's a great deal more than five years ago. It's nearer ten, when I lived across the street, and used to see him go in and out of this house.

"We all knew him, we young fellows who boarded over there. Can it be possible?"

"It may be," my friend answered. "Indeed, you are right. He did live here about that time."

"But you — you," I cried, "who are you? Or in what way were you connected with this tragedy?"

"I," he replied, "had no connection with this suicide at all. I was, in fact, a sufferer too, from the circumstances that led up to it. I am going to tell you the whole story from the beginning. To commence with, I was the partner in business with this young man's father. I knew him well, not only in a business way, but as a friend, for we had grown up as boys together in the office of a produce broker a good many years ago. Pardon me if I grow reminiscent, but I can't help looking back to those days long ago when Charlie Clements and I were happy, careless boys — and now —! But we grew to manhood, and started in business together. We prospered till we were both quite well-to-do. During the days of the Civil War, when we had barely begun, we made a great deal of money. Our house continued in business for many years; you must know that I am not a young man, nor even a middle-aged one. I am getting old now, though a good constitution is helping me to keep off actual infirmities. Well, when Charlie Clements married, it was to the girl we both loved. That is the reason I never married, myself. But I remained his

friend, and he mine, and time passed. They had three children, but two died, and only the youngest, Albert,"— I saw him shudder, and his eyes moved towards where that man must have been sitting then, — "only Albert was left. Then they came to this house at about the time Albert left college. The boy didn't go to work. He had evidently learned too much of the softer side of life, and his father, as some men will do who have had to work hard themselves, seemed never to make up his mind to compel his son to earn his living. It was a fatal weakness. The boy grew willful and wild. What is the use of multiplying words? In time he became uncontrollable. It took perhaps five or six years to make him an utterly worthless, luxurious man about town — a rich man's son, whose father paid all his bills. There were some very heavy ones too. His parents idolized him, and so, no matter what he did, his father backed him up. I knew nothing of it — not then. Business seemed to go along the same as ever, though I did notice that my partner was getting old very fast. That, though, I thought was but the effects of a lifetime of overwork. Had I known what was taking place, I might have stopped it, or made the attempt, at least; or I might have protected my own capital, at all events. I could not imagine that my partner was using the firm's money; but he did come to do that in time, for his own was all gone. You see, his son spent so much that the old man went into Wall Street to recoup. But he only lost still more, with the result that he had nothing left of his own; and he had to have money in one way or another. I don't believe he ever meant to misuse mine, only we had been so long together, he must have come to regard everything in the business as our common property. Besides, he was getting old. Care was making inroads in his mental health as well, and he must have been desperate. Anyhow, he was drawing a lot of money constantly, and I never suspected that we were coming near to a crash, as I, — well, I have to blame myself too; a man should be alive to things, and I was not. It happens often to-day, and will happen often again. Well, after Albert Clements had gone on in this way for a number of years, he met a woman, one of those creatures for whom a man would go through the plagues of hell. You might expect that a man who had for years been

accustomed to the society of women would be proof against the wiles of a creature whose charms, perhaps, lay in a brighter eye than the rest, or a redder mouth, or a quicker wit. The French people call it *diable au corps*. This woman certainly had it. I saw her once, only once. She was certainly beautiful, but the young man, having come under her influence, was beyond redemption. His excesses had been mild before compared to his habits now; and excesses, I believe, lead to insanity,—plain, unmistakable madness. I am sure Albert Clements had become insane. To have reasoned with him now would have been utterly futile. He was lost to shame, honor, decency, — everything. And so his poor father and invalid mother, after they had spent a fortune in paying his debts, were threatened with absolute beggary. Our business went under. I, too, was a poor man. Clements begged me on his knees to forgive him, and his wife nearly went mad before my eyes on that occasion. The boy — he was not at home — had been away with that woman for a week. They couldn't tell where he was. As for me, what could I do, or of what use was it to reproach this poor old dotard, the friend of my youth? I forbore, too, for his wife's sake. And that day I left their house, this house, with only a few dollars in my pocket, and my good name gone forever. Somehow, all the sense and reason in my nature, and also all the good, all the godliness in me, must have come to my aid then, for I braced up wonderfully, and went to work for ten dollars a week. I remember knowing a man who lost, in one day, one hundred thousand dollars in speculation. He is as happy to-day as a poor man as he ever was in affluence. Well, I lost sight of Clements for a few months, and what followed in this house I did not know, till one day he sent for me, and told me what had taken place, and what you and I have looked upon to-night.

"It seems the son had that room fitted up from some whim, as it was a dark inside room with no windows and only a small scuttle to ventilate it (I had been in it only once, by chance, and so knew nothing of its situation). He used to come here to sleep, as he said it was a room to which no sound penetrated. This I did not know till Clements told me when he sent for me after we had parted, and up to to-night I did not know positively

that it was this room he meant, as he did not describe it accurately, and from my having been in it only once before for a moment, I did not fix it in my mind. However, my former partner sent for me, as I said. He was nearly gone. He had left this house and moved to a dingy little place far up town, on the extreme West side. I found him lying on his bed, and knew he had not long to live. When I had seen him last he looked like an old, broken-down man, but now he was literally drawing his last few breaths. His wife was dead — killed by the shock of her son's suicide. The young man (so Clements told me brokenly) had gone to this room after coming home at the end of that week when I had last been in the house. It was about three o'clock when he came in. He heard the story of the ruin he had caused. He saw what he had done; so, going to his room, without stopping to take his hat off, he deliberately shot himself dead. Horrible? Yes, it was. But it was Nemesis. I will not say he deserved his fate. I do not think any man deserves such an end. But he had brought it on himself. The old man, I suppose, was horror-stricken, and his mind gave way when his wife, rushing upstairs, opened the door, looked in, saw what — what we saw to-night, and fell dead on the door-sill. You may well say 'horrible' now."

He stopped; his eyes were full of tears; his whole body shook, and his head hung forward on his breast. After awhile he went on:—

"Clements must have been nearly maddened then. Surely he had become crazy. It was easy to understand. When I saw him, and while he was telling me this awful tale, he was certainly more mad than any madman I have ever seen. But he was a weak, powerless one, only his mind was gone, and I knew so, too, his life would soon be gone. He told me all, though, but he did not say in what room the young man had killed himself. He just said, 'in that room.'

"'Joe,' he cried, clutching my arm, 'I buried her, my wife. But him — I walled him up. I buried him right there. And there he is now. Joe, do you hear? At the last trumpet call, he'll wake and know once more what he has done, for he'll see the pistol, and look in the mirror and see the hole in his head, and he'll see the clothes he wore that night, and he'll know it

all. He's there yet, and there he'll remain till the end. No one knows. You won't tell, Joe, will you? No, no, not you. He wronged you, too. Do you forgive him, Joe? I don't. No, no; Joe, Joe, I say, friend — Joe.' It was all he said. Charlie Clements was dead."

For at least a quarter of an hour I made no sound. I saw my friend bury his head in his arm, and heard him sob like a man who lived over again the saddest moment of his life. This man, who was alone in the world, with only the past to look back upon, whose history had been such a sad one — now, at the recollection of these strange and sad events, wept. And I, myself, felt the hot tears course down my face, and turned my head away. I heard the little clock tick, and a door slam somewhere below. But here there was silence. I could not speak a word.

At last he spoke again.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones, he said, "it is too much for my composure, this going over these times once more. I cannot show you with half vividness enough these things as they really took place. To me, of course, nothing else can ever stand out so distinctly. However, I will finish my story. After burying my poor friend, and learning that he had absolutely nothing left in the world, not even the small equity in this house, which I had thought he had retained through everything, I went back to work. There was not very much for me in life. But I had fully decided on my course, having fought and conquered that battle with myself which all men who have had my experience must fight. And so I took up my life again, and bleak and barren as it was, I have been living it ever since, — sometimes very poor, never with more than enough. Often I thought of the suicide, but not with the idea of taking any steps to learn where his body was. Finally, however, after some years, I did decide to come here and engage board; not exactly with the purpose of searching for him, as I could not tell but what, in making some alterations, they had found his skeleton, though I always searched the papers every day, and never saw any account of it, — but in a vague way I felt interested enough to come here. My idea was to hire every room, successively, as it became vacant, and as my means permitted; though, had I found what I was thinking of, I do not

know whether I should have made it known, and do not know, either, if I shall do so now."

"And I," I exclaimed, "shall do nothing at all. I leave it all to you, though I think it best for us to remain silent. What good can it do? I have no desire to gain notoriety, or perhaps get into trouble, if only for a short time. It might cost me my position, and I am poor."

Do you think I am selfish? Well, I know what three meals a day and a living mean, and I know the other side of the picture too. I have experienced both.

My friend gazed at me for a moment.

"Perhaps you are right. I will see," he said. "At all events, I am going to take some time to think it over. I have discovered what I had in view so long, though before I expected it, and in a way I did not calculate on. It did not occur to me that there was a room unaccounted for on this landing. How did you find it out?"

"In the simplest way," I replied; and then gave an account of the chance by which I had discovered the disparity existing between the measurements of the hallway and the two large rooms, and the length to which my curiosity had led me.

"Had I known what I was about to look upon when I made those holes," I concluded, "nothing could have induced me to do it. When I did see it, — well, I don't mind telling you, I fainted. Those eyes — heavens! How they came to be fixed exactly on the spot where I broke through, I don't know — but I couldn't stand it. I just rushed out and waited for you. If you hadn't come, I certainly would not have come up here again. Oh, it is horrible!"

As I finished I put my hands up to my eyes, as if to shut the dreadful sight out from my vision. But in vain. I can see it now as plainly as the first time that night. I always shall.

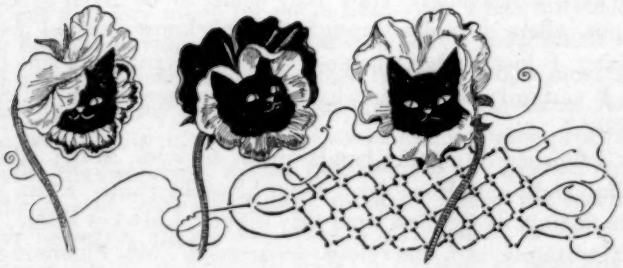
"It certainly is a marvelous occurrence," Mr. Flemming said. "I cannot, though, account for the gas burning all this time. I suppose the boy's father left it burning, so that at whatever moment the trumpet should sound, he could see himself as at the time of his death."

"And," I said, "I suppose, the room being air tight, the body has been preserved."

"But," said my friend, "a light cannot burn without air. Only, I presume, just air enough got in, some way, to permit of the existence of the flame, but not enough to corrupt the body, — only just sufficient to dry the skin, and in a way mummify the corpse. Ah! it is strange. And when I look back — "

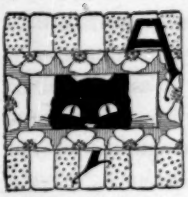
He did not finish, but became silent in thought. We had said all that was to be said, and now could only think in silence of this weird life story and its astonishing sequel.

All that night we remained together, sitting in my friend's room talking, in our chairs. The next day Mr. Flemming took the large room. In fact, we both took it, for I have found a lifelong friend in him whose fate was joined to mine in so peculiar a way. Long since we moved out of that house, having removed every sign of the hole which had disclosed so much to us. But the discovery of the unknown and unsuspected mystery we leave to time and other men; for my friend will not undo the work or defy the wishes of the friend of his boyhood. And I — I am content.



Mrs. Sloan's Curiosity.

BY MABELL SHIPPIE CLARKE.



SCENE of embarrassment was in progress in Mrs. Parker Sloan's library. Mrs. Sloan was very much a woman of the world, yet it was evident that there was an undercurrent of feeling beneath her air of calm attention. The young man before her, though usually of enviable self-possession, wore an expression approaching guilt. The fact was that Mr. Simms — Mr. G. F. S. Simms, North Carolina, his card read, in the generous style in which Southerners imply that they are known throughout their State — Mr. Simms was asking Mrs. Sloan for the privilege of marrying her daughter, and Mrs. Sloan very properly had asked him several questions, one of which he had declined to answer. Hence the strained situation.

Not that it should be inferred for a moment that so practical and far-seeing a person as Mrs. Sloan had not made investigation anent Mr. Simms, and his position, financial and social, long before his ardor had reached the present crisis. Left for many years a widow, she had proved herself an excellent woman of business, and when young Simms became devoted to Nathalie, she had, as a matter of course, written to a lawyer in the town from which he came, and asked certain questions which she felt sure that Mr. Sloan would have asked had he been living.

The reply had been satisfactory. G. F. S. Simms was the only child and heir of McRae Simms, a man rich, philanthropic and eccentric. Mr. Simms had left his son this, that, and the other real estate, valued at an amount that would have gone far to content Mrs. Sloan had his social position been not so satisfactory as it was. She knew, besides, that he had come to Boston well introduced, was a member of two good clubs, was good looking, with the dark hair and eyes that Northerners think is more typical

of the South than is true, and was well read, and altogether a desirable match for Nathalie.

Of course Nathalie knew nothing of her mother's researches. She had been asked to be the handsome young fellow's wife, and she had said that she would if mamma was willing. There was a look in her blue eyes — a look strikingly like her mother's, too, — that said that she would even if mamma were not willing.

And now this painful interview. It had not been painful until after Mrs. Sloan had asked her questions — very spontaneously, be it said, to the credit of her dramatic power — and received replies to them which corroborated her North Carolina correspondent, and at last had said with her most gracious smile, for she could be very winning: —

"My dear Mr. Simms, I see no reason why you and Nathalie should not be happy, and as for me, I shall be glad to have a son as well as a daughter."

Simms had beamed upon her, and had thought her charming, with her fine figure, and snow-white hair rolled high above her still fresh face.

But she spoiled it all. Mr. Simms had known that it must come, sooner or later, but he wished that it had not come just now, when he was so happy.

"It seems curious to think that, though we know you so well, we don't know your first name. What am I to call my son?"

Mr. Simms flushed, but answered without hesitation: "My family and my intimate friends have always called me 'G.'"

"'G?' How very strange! and what is it really?"

"Oh, a curious name of my father's selection. I've told you, haven't I, that he was eccentric?"

"I always say that a child ought not to have a name until he is old enough to be consulted about it. And yours is?" — tentatively.

Simms felt that he must take his stand at once, and he replied with decision.

"My name, Mrs. Sloan, is very disagreeable to me, and I have never used anything but my initials. My family and friends, as I said, have called me 'G,' and I should prefer not to tell my Christian name even to you."

It was here that Mrs. Sloan's appearance of calm attention was ruffled just a wee bit by the irritation she was experiencing, and that the young man on the other side of the room wore a distinctly guilty look. He gazed beyond his prospective mother-in-law out of the window and across the Charles River to the picturesque boathouse on the other shore.

There is a long main street in Norham, as in many New England towns, bordered by graceful elms and lined by pretty houses whose grounds, on one side of the road, slope to the river. Mrs. Sloan's was one of these; a fine old dwelling of Revolutionary date, with a long library extending the length of the house. The rear window afforded an outlook for Mr. Simms's embarrassed gaze. Perhaps Mrs. Sloan would have let the subject drop at this point had she not happened to glance out of the front window, and see, walking down Main Street, Mrs. Mortimer. At once there sounded upon her mental ear the questions that Mrs. Mortimer would ask about Nathalie's betrothed, and the interrogations that would be put by Mrs. Mortimer's sisters, Mrs. Weston and Mrs. Bates, and her husband's sister, Mary Lyman, and her brother's wife, Dora Munroe, and her cousins, the Leffingwells, and her West Norham connections, the Dorseys, and all the network of relatives and kinsmen who comprise the descendants of three or four of the early settlers of the town. Thinking thus, and unobservant of the straight line into which Simms's mouth had settled, Mrs. Sloan began again.

"But wouldn't it be better for us to talk it over frankly now? You see there will be so many questions asked about a newcomer. Norham is like Concord and Andover — it requires a residence of three generations, at least, to remove the stigma of being a late arrival."

She said it very well, but she had met with an obstinacy equal to her own.

"Should it ever be necessary, Mrs. Sloan, you may depend upon me for meeting the necessity; and, until then, let me ask that you will not refer to the matter."

"And Nathalie?"

"I suppose I may see her now?" returned Simms, wilfully misunderstanding her.

Mrs. Sloan went to call her daughter, and "G" told her all about it, and she said that she didn't care the least bit in the world what his name was or whether he had any at all.

However, as time went on, Nathalie saw an uncomfortable something in the mental atmosphere to which even the preparations for the wedding could not blind her. For one thing, her mother and her lover, the two people she loved most dearly, were on terms of formality which she could not change. Then the torrents of questions that her mother had anticipated duly were asked, and Nathalie grew tired of saying: "He has a funny name that he doesn't like, and I always call him 'G,'" and of being begged: "Oh, do tell *me* what it is, Nathalie, I'll never tell."

At first she owned frankly that she did not know it, and was met by a stare of amazement. Then these friends went forth and told others.

After several people had said, "I understand that you don't know what Mr. Simms's name is, Nathalie," and several more had hinted, just hinted delicately to Mrs. Sloan, "Do you think it's quite safe to let Nathalie marry — er — you know?" And after Mrs. Sloan could endure it no longer, and had given her daughter a sound scolding for the delinquencies of her lover, — it was after all this, that Nathalie told "G" all about it, and cried out all her worry and annoyance on the shoulder that its possessor hoped would bear her burdens for her evermore.

"Now listen, sweetheart. I'll tell you this miserable old name, and you can tell your mother and every one else, if you like, that you know it, but what it is I don't want you to make known to any one at all unless I give you permission. Will you promise?"

Of course Nathalie promised.

Then "G" whispered to her.

"Oh, 'G,' not really? That's awful! Oh!" and the young girl sat aghast, looking at the man she loved as if he were a living curiosity.

"Isn't it a howler, pet? Do you wonder I don't use it? How do you think your mother would like it?"

"Can't you change it, 'G'?"

"My dear, it was given me by my father, a good man, but

extremely eccentric. When, as a boy, I rebelled against it, he declared that if I gave up my Christian name I gave up my family name as well. And as I love and respect his memory, as I loved and respected him, I shall continue to bear the name he gave me, though it has proved and still will prove a great annoyance."

Naturally, it was not soothing to Mrs. Sloan to know that her daughter knew a secret that she did not, even though it concerned Nathalie more nearly than it did her mother. Her curiosity was aroused to the highest pitch. She wrote to the lawyer in North Carolina with whom she had corresponded before, but from him she received no reply. Perhaps he thought it a question too trivial to answer; perhaps "G" — who knows? — had forestalled her.

Then she secured all the lists of students published by the University of Virginia during the years when Simms was in residence there — only to find the initials, "G. F. S.," and not the full name, as a reward for her search. Simms had had a hard struggle with the authorities for four years about those catalogues, and had won his case only by refusing absolutely to tell his name; and of course they could not put in what they did not know.

As the time appointed for the wedding drew near, Mrs. Sloan's annoyance was so great that Nathalie ventured to intercede with "G."

"Do tell her, 'G.' I believe that once you tell her, she'll forget all this irritation and be sweet again."

"I tell you what, dear, I'll compromise with her," returned "G." "You wait here while I go and speak to her," and he ran up to Mrs. Sloan's sitting-room like a repentant schoolboy.

"Mrs. Sloan," he said, "I've come to compromise. I'm truly sorry that not telling you my name annoys you, and agree to have it in full on the wedding invitations, provided you agree that Nathalie shall not get a single peep at them till they are sent out."

After due deliberation the compromise was accepted.

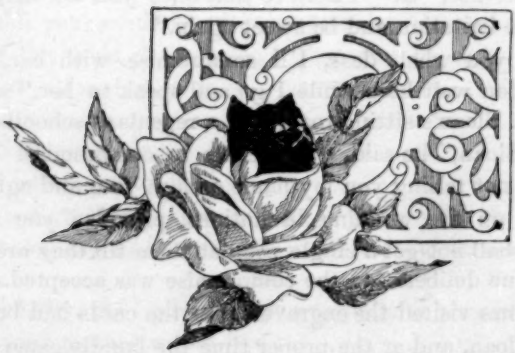
Mr. Simms visited the engraver after the cards had been ordered by Mrs. Sloan, and at the proper time the bundle came home.

Mrs. Sloan did not disguise her eagerness to cut the strings, and hastily seized the uppermost sheet.

It read: —

MRS. PARKER SLOAN
INVITES YOU TO BE PRESENT
AT THE MARRIAGE OF HER DAUGHTER
NATHALIE
TO
MR. GREENVILLE FEMALE SEMINARY SIMMS,
ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE FIRST,
AT FIVE O'CLOCK, IN THE
FIRST CHURCH,
NORHAM,
1895.

That is how the descendant of the Massachusetts Puritans became one of the joint owners of a name which is really inscribed on the records of a Southern State. This may sound like romance, but it is an actual fact, and one which can easily be verified.



The Seaweed Room.

BY CLARICE IRENE CLINGHAN.

"THIS is the seaweed room," announced the housekeeper, putting a key into the lock; "it's been shut up for a long time, and will be a bit musty."

With this she threw open the stout oaken door, and we entered a square apartment, darkened by closed shutters, and heavy with a strong, pungent odor. As our guide raised a window and opened the blinds there was a rustling all about us as of the flight of pigeons. This was caused by the fluttering of quantities of dry seaweed which were festooned upon the walls, and over the doors and windows.

"That's nothing but common seaweed," said the good woman, noticing our interested glances. "It's used only as an ornament and to give character to the room. All the choice varieties are in these glass cases, and pressed in this pile of scrapbooks, with notes and explanations under 'em."

"Did Professor Linwood collect these specimens himself?" I asked.

"I suppose so. He used to go on long voyages to the tropics and come home laden with new varieties, and then he'd spend months classifying and arranging them. He was a diver in his younger days, and after that made contracts for lifting sunken vessels, or exploring old hulks that had money or merchandise on board. He'd put on his diving suit and go down with his men, I've heard tell, and many's the strange adventures he's had in ships at the bottom of the ocean — so he told me one day when he felt chatty. That's how he first took to collecting seaweeds; he ransacked the bottom of the sea to get specimens. But after his marriage he never seemed to care for it any more. But perhaps

all this don't interest you — it's the seaweed you want. You can examine it as much as you like."

We did so and lingered long, held by the charm of this strange room, that was redolent with the mysteries of the great deep. We sat on a couch, talking in low tones and listening to the rustling seaweeds over our heads, our feet resting on some of the same material, which had been fashioned into a rude mat that covered the floor and also the divan on which we were seated. The whole apartment was full of it in all forms and phases. A wreath of it surrounded the only portrait in the room — that of a young girl with frank pleasing eyes and a sweet mouth.

The housekeeper, who had excused herself for a few moments, now returned with tea and biscuits. As she poured the fragrant beverage into little fat cups we ventured to inquire who the original of the picture was.

"Mrs. Linwood, the professor's wife," replied the woman, giving a quick, apprehensive look at it over her shoulder.

"Then," replied my companion, "it's no wonder the professor took no more voyages after his marriage!"

"I said he collected no more seaweed, sir," responded the housekeeper. "He made one voyage directly after his marriage, and took his bride with him. The vessel was wrecked in a terrific storm and only a few of the passengers were saved. Mrs. Linwood was among the lost."

"That was an odd coincidence — that she should be lost and he be saved," I said, half questioningly.

"Well, sir, that leads up to the most peculiar story you ever heard. As long as the professor lived I never dared breathe it, but now he's gone I might relate a strange circumstance in connection with this room."

We encouraged her so much that the good woman began immediately.

"It was not until the professor was nearly sixty that he thought of taking a wife. Then he was very foolish, if I may be allowed to say it, for he fell in love with a little girl only eighteen, and he being rich, her parents favored the match, though she was much attached to a second cousin of hers, a young fellow in an importing house, poor, but with good prospects; and, as

luck would have it, this cousin was on the same steamer that took the professor and his bride to China, he going there on business for his firm.

"It must have been hard for the two poor young things to be doomed to such a long voyage, under such circumstances, especially as the professor was of an intensely jealous disposition and forbade his wife to speak to her cousin.

"But, as I said, the vessel ran aground in a storm and sank almost immediately. Mrs. Linwood was drowned; and her husband came back a changed man, broken in mind and body. He had even lost his interest in his particular fad, and I have seen him shudder at the sight of a piece of seaweed. He locked up this room and I never saw him enter it again except on one notable occasion."

"What was that?" inquired my companion.

"Well, you see, not having his scientific studies to take up his mind, the poor man became very lonesome and morbid. He never wanted to be alone, and must needs have a houseful of company the whole time. This was easy, for he had a great many nephews and nieces, and they, with their friends, kept us in a state of commotion, especially during the holidays and in summer vacations.

"One Christmas eve, his favorite nephew, Jack Newton, came late in the evening, and to save my soul I didn't know where to put him to sleep. He was a merry, rollicking lad of seventeen, and he said he'd sleep in the attic — anywhere so that he got a chance at the dinner next day — always thinking of his stomach, like any healthy boy.

"The attic was out of the question. Suddenly a thought came to me, and I asked him if he'd mind sleeping in the seaweed room?

"'Just the thing — awfully jolly,' said the boy, giving me a squeeze that nearly broke my neck.

"'Then not a word to your uncle,' I said, as soon as I could speak.

"'Mum's the word,' said the boy with a wink.

"So I fixed him a bunk on this 'ere couch we're a-sitting on, and, as it was bitter cold, started a bit of fire in the grate. Then I locked him in and carried away the key, so if by some strange

chance the professor should stray up there late in the evening he would find the key gone, and probably think it had been mislaid, for it usually hung on a nail beside the door.

"If I'd known the queer tricks of this room then as I do now, I'd never have locked the boy in.

"What happened during that night I got straight from Jack himself. It seems he went straight to sleep, and never woke till the faintest bit of daylight was stealing into his window. Then he was aroused, poor chap, by a low murmur of voices, and sitting up he saw on the hearth two figures talking together — one a girl with long black hair, and the other a young man who held her hands and was bending his face down to hers. Both of 'em was dripping wet, and he could hear the trickle of the water as it fell on the big stone hearth they were standing on. Their faces were turned from him, but in the girl's hair was tangled a quantity of seaweed.

"Did I tell you Jack was a plucky little fellow? He was, to the backbone. He said to himself that what he saw was 'an optical delusion,' I believe he called it, that there was nobody but himself in the room — there couldn't be, because the door was locked. 'What do you want — who are you?' he cried, and with that jumped out of bed and came straight towards the two figures. As he advanced they retreated towards the window; and when he reached the window there wasn't anything there, though the window was shut except for a little space at the top.

"Well, Jack went back to bed and lay thinking it over for an hour, then fell asleep again. He was perfectly healthy, Jack was, and hadn't much idea of the supernatural.

"But now comes the strange part of it; for as he was dressing the next morning what did the boy find but a pool of salt water on the stone hearth, in that little hollow you can see from here that has been worn in it, and lying in it a bit of fresh seaweed, in which was tangled a long black hair! Then, as Jack told me, his own hair began to rise in good earnest, and he was scared.

"So that morning after breakfast he takes the bit of seaweed to his uncle and asks him if he'd ever seen any like it.

"The professor looked at the piece of wet weed, and his color went like the going out of a lighted taper. 'It's an uncommon

variety,' he said, 'as it's never found except on the bodies of drowned people. Where did you get it, Jack?' And he looked at the boy wild-like, for I was a-watching of 'em from the passageway.

"'I found it in my room,' blurted out the boy. 'There was a couple of people in there last night, uncle, dripping wet.'

"'What do you mean?' gasped his uncle, looking at him strangely.

"'Come and I'll show you,' he says, in spite of the fact that I was shaking my fist at him from the hallway. So together they went up to the seaweed room, I following to explain why I'd taken the liberty to lodge Jack there. But the professor never noticed me. He followed Jack into the room, white to the lips, and kneeling down examined the little pool of water on the hearth. 'It's sea water,' he whispered, after a moment. 'What did you see, boy? Tell me everything.'

"'There's nothing much to tell, uncle,' went on Jack, in his straightforward way. 'The girl's hair was down her back all wet, and full of seaweed. And see! Here's a long black hair in the seaweed I found.'

"The professor looked, then gave a cry such as I hope never to hear again, and fell back on the floor unconscious. He came back to life, but never was well after it, and he died six weeks afterward. Before he went he became communicative, and the secret of his wife's death came out. He and his wife were in a small boat, the last to leave the sinking vessel, together with a few other passengers and one sailor. The professor, being a man of authority and a well-known seaman, was in charge of the boat. Just as they were pushing off they saw a figure clinging to the mast just above the water. It was Mrs. Linwood's cousin and former lover. At this she cried to her husband to put back to the ship and rescue him, and took on so at his danger that the demon of jealousy entered her husband's soul, and he swore it would be impossible to go back, and that to take another person into the boat would sink it. At that moment the mast disappeared, and as it did so the young man sprang into the sea, waving a farewell to his cousin. Then, with one look at the professor that he never forgot to his dying day, she, too, jumped

overboard and probably sank immediately — at least, the body could not be recovered.

"Yes, it was a strange thing, those two coming back — if it was them — to this room; those who have book-learning can make it clear, perhaps, but I'm only an ignorant old woman and don't understand these deep things; I can only tell it to you just as it happened."

The Second Edition.

BY GEIK TURNER.

"HOW are things going?" asked the city editor, as he came in at six o'clock that evening.

"Rank," replied his assistant; "no end of cranks. This room's been a regular gibbering lunatic asylum all the afternoon. First, one fellow came in with an electric fly-killer, and then another with a bicycle sidewalk cleaner — sort of a snow-sweeper — and another had a patent compressed food pill, and there were several hundred men with communications to the editor. I'm all wasted away standing them off. That epileptic patient was up again, too, threatening to have a fit on our nice clean floor if we didn't put in a correction for him. He's the worst of the lot; he's a cuckoo, he is."

"What does he want now?" queried the chief. "He's had one item."

"That's what I told him. I said he'd been arrested for stealing, and we'd published the fact, and that when the police released him, we published that too; what else did he want? But he seemed to expect us to pledge ourselves to the dear public that he was innocent. Then I told him we hadn't said he was guilty in the first place, and in the second place, the police thought he was guilty, only they couldn't quite prove it. Anyway, we couldn't be expected to get out a fourteen-page paper every day vindicating him. Oh, we got quite heated up over it; had a regular joint debate on his previous record. I rather thought he'd be here when you came in, but by and by I tired him out, I guess, and he left. He wanted to know if the office was open this evening. I told him yes, it was, till four o'clock to-morrow morning. Considering we were a morning paper, we generally had to keep open nights."

. . . . . .

It was 3.55 A. M., and the telegraph editor was cursing the newspaper business for the one hundred and eleventh time during the night. All of it was bad enough, he assured himself, but it was ghastly human sacrifice to compel a man to spend a large fraction of his life waiting two hours every morning, after "good-night" had come over the telegraph wire, to prevent a scoop on an impossible piece of telephone news.

He rattled the waste copy and newspapers before him off on the floor in an indiscriminate and wholesale attempt to clear up for the next day. The yellow glow from his electric lamp, hemmed in by its green paper shade, shone down across his face, and made his desk a little island of golden light in the big black news room. The monotonous ticking of the old office clock filled the empty place with its exaggerated noise. Outside he heard the groups of compositors, as they were discharged, go laughing and clattering down the stairway until their noise died away in the lower stories and disappeared into the street.

After a little silence there was another step that he couldn't account for — a peculiar shambling step, evidently directed upstairs. Probably, he thought, it was the janitor, or one of the compositors who had forgotten something and was coming back — only it didn't seem like the janitor's walk, and the compositors seldom took that kind of gait when they were hurrying back.

The strange step passed directly by the composing-room and into the editorial hall, and the big glass door slammed after it. It wavered and stopped at the local room, and then after a moment continued down the corridor, hesitating from time to time as its owner shook violently at the doors of the editorial writers' rooms. And then at last it passed on by degrees, until it stopped definitely at the threshold of the news room.

"Where's the editor?" asked a voice from outer darkness.

"I'm one of the editors," said the telegraph man, looking up.

"You ain't the one I saw," said the voice suspiciously. "Tall, fat fellow, with a big moustache; what do you call him?"

"Oh, he's the city editor," said the telegraph man.

"Yes, that's it; where's he?"

"Gone."

"Gone!"

The stranger had come up into the penumbra around the electric light. He was a tall, thin man, in a slouch hat and a pale brown overcoat. In one hand he carried a slip of paper, and in the other something metallic, apparently, that looked like a bunch of gas-pipe. He was a peculiar looking man. His face was long and white, and his hands were painfully bony, and his eyes certainly did look queer. He had the air of a person who wanted something very badly, and had made up his mind to have it very soon. The telegraph man sized him up for a crank.

"Yes," said that functionary, "he's been gone for two or three hours." He began to get up and reached out for the lamp, hoping to shut off debate simultaneously with the light.

"Hold on," said the stranger, with the air of one having authority. The telegraph editor was a little man, whose best stock in trade in a heated argument was always discretion,—and the stranger loomed up indefinitely above him. After a second's hesitation, the editor decided to reason with him.

"What do you want to have done?" he said.

"I've got a correction here you've got to make," said the stranger.

"Oh, I can't do that sort of thing," said the telegraph man, cheerfully, "you'll have to see the city editor. Come around this afternoon about two o'clock."

He reached up his hand again to the electric light.

"You sit down," said the stranger, with a tone of frank determination. At the same time he brought his right hand up into the light with the bunch of gas-pipe. It was a revolver, with a bore like a small tunnel. He pressed the muzzle up against one eyebrow of the telegraph man, who stared wildly down along the barrel and saw the conical bullets peeping out of their holes in the cylinder, like the heads of nasty little animals peering out of their burrows. He sat down hurriedly.

The old office clock ticked loud and apprehensively. Outside in the hall, the foreman of the composing-room and his assistant closed the rear of the procession of compositors and left the telegraph man alone on the floor with his visitor. The silence was very impressive.

"I ain't comin' up here again," the stranger said finally, "I've

come often enough already. I've been thinking this thing over all night long, and now I'm goin' to have it in the paper to-morrow, and it's goin' to be in to suit me this time. I've written it out myself. Here, you read that; that's what I want."

He let down his revolver with his right hand and brought up the piece of paper in his left. It was a dirty sheet, torn out of a blank book, apparently, covered with coarse writing in a lead pencil, and blurred and dirty with erasures.

The telegraph man lapped off his lips a couple of times and began to scan the paper obediently. This is what he read: —

"The hell-brats of the law say that Mr. Abel Hoffenheimer is a thief. They lie. He ain't a thief, and they know it. But still they hold him, and they throw him into loathsome cells and persecute him always with their deadly hate. They have their reasons for doing what they do. There is a conspiracy against him — a blood-red, stony-hearted, hell-fed conspiracy. We know what it is and who made it, and they would hound him to his death if they only could. But let them beware. We know what, but we ain't saying. Only this much. Their time will come. As for us not wanting to do no man no injury, we go down on our knees, and we lap the dust before him and eat all the words we have wrote about him."

"That's it," said the stranger appreciatively, when the telegraph man had quavered through this text. "Now what do you call your head man — the boss of the place, I mean."

"Managing editor," responded his victim meekly.

"What's his name," queried the stranger.

"Mr. Penfield."

"Well, you write at the end of that 'signed,' and then you put down his name."

So the telegraph man wrote down at the bottom, "Signed, Erastus J. Penfield, managing editor."

"Now that's the way you're goin' to put it in," said the stranger.

"But I can't put it in to-morrow; all the compositors have gone home," said the telegraph man plaintively.

This statement had an unpleasant effect on the stranger; it excited him.

"You're an editor, ain't you?" he asked.

"Yes, that is — yes, I suppose I am."

"Well, an editor can get an item into the paper, can't he?" continued the stranger, with convincing logic.

"Yes," said the telegraph man, "but he can't print them; the compositors do that, you know."

The stranger didn't know about that; all he knew was that the correction was going in, and if there wasn't anybody else to do it, the telegraph man would have to do it himself.

"But I can't print. I'd like to, first rate," said the telegraph man pathetically, "but I can't. I never printed anything in my life."

But the stranger was obdurate; he said the editor would have to learn, because that correction was going in.

"This paper didn't treat me right; no, it didn't," he went on; "it said I stole."

The memory of his wrongs made him rather maudlin for a minute. The telegraph man didn't like to see him maudlin, because it made him wave his gun about in such a careless, irresponsible way. But the stranger was not long in mastering his emotions.

"You see that," he said, shoving the tunnel of the revolver into the telegraph man's face again.

The telegraph man confessed that he saw it.

"If I let that off into you, you darned little runt," the stranger continued, "there wouldn't be anything left of you but a rim. Now it's either one thing or the other; either I get that correction or I feed you what's in there. I'm goin' to have that item corrected if I have to wipe out everybody in this concern, one after another. And I'd just as soon begin with you as anybody. Now, are you goin' to give me that correction, or ain't you?"

"I'll try," murmured the telegraph man.

So they formed in single file and marched out through the crooked hall into the composing-room, without further remarks. The telegraph man, who went ahead, felt the cold wind blowing out of that revolver on the back of his neck every step, and he wasn't in the mood for frivolous conversation. The only remark made by the stranger was to the effect that he was damned if he

didn't believe he'd shoot him anyway; which the telegraph man was prayerfully pleased to consider a selfish and unprofitable jest.

The procession passed into the stale tobacco smoke of the jet-black and deserted composing-room, and halted while the telegraph man turned on the electric light. It then passed on again to the speaking-tube to the press-room, where the telegraph man carefully explained that he was free from guile in calling up the people downstairs, because the press always had to be stopped when a correction was made. The stranger said nothing, but poked the end of the tunnel into the cerebellum of the telegraph man with great eloquence. Then the telegraph man rang the electric bell.

"Hello," he said to the head stereotyper, "you'll have to have them stop the press and put on another page."

It was 4.15 o'clock. The language of the head stereotyper was unparliamentary in the extreme. What was the use, he argued, at this time of morning.

"It's a correction. I've just got to make it," said the telegraph editor, feeling the ring of the revolver barrel crowded into the back of his head. "Really I've got to, it's very important."

The head stereotyper appreciated the necessity of a very important correction, though his tone of voice didn't indicate it.

"Well, get a gait on you," he said, among other things, "it'll only be in the city anyway."

Downstairs the rattling of the big press diminished and stopped.

The procession in the composing-room formed again and marched to the switch that turned on the current to the dynamo, and the gearing of the type-setting machines started up. The telegraph man blessed the day that type-setting machines were invented, and also the time when he learned the general principles of them. If it had been "sticking" type, now, that had to be done —

But it wasn't sticking type, and there was a slight ray of hope. He went around behind the first machine, lit the gas under the metal pot, and then came back and sat down at the keyboard. The rest of it was easy now; he needed only work the keyboard like a typewriter; the machine did the rest. He never had operated the thing, but he had seen it done hundreds of times.

At this moment an idea struck the half-paralyzed brain of the

telegraph man. He could print anything he wanted to, he thought, and his visitor wouldn't know the difference.

He actually started out to do this.

"Hold on there," said the man, "how do I know what you're printin'?"

"Well, I don't suppose you do," admitted the telegraph man.

"I'm goin' to," said the managing editor *pro tem*, "and you've got to show me."

"Well, I suppose I can show you a proof," said the unfortunate editor in despair. "Say, take that revolver away from my neck," he added. "I can't work this when that's there; I've made a mistake already. Now I'll have to begin all over again."

So a compromise was agreed upon, and the stranger looked over the telegraph man's shoulder in intense silence, as he painfully pecked away at the keyboard and the matrices jingled down the machine into their places. The performance occupied some eras for the telegraph man, but at last it was done.

Then the procession formed again and went over and took a proof on the proof machine. It wasn't a very artistic piece of printing that appeared, but, as the telegraph man reminded his chief *pro tem*, it was his first attempt and you couldn't expect too much. His chief finally passed it. But he was particular about its position.

"I want that where everybody's goin' to see it," he said. "Now, where's the place your boss puts what he writes?"

The telegraph man murmured it was the editorial page, and the stranger said that was what he wanted.

So the editorial form was hauled out, and the correction went in at the head of the first column in double leads. The telegraph man jabbed out a small editorial on the foreign question to make a place for it, hammered down the page as level as he could, screwed it up and sent it down the form elevator.

When they heard the press starting up again, the telegraph man explained that the correction was made.

But the stranger intimated that he did his business in a more thorough manner. Reading a proof might be all right, but he required further assurances.

"When do I see the paper?" he asked.

"Why, if you want to, you can see it right now. Just let me go down after it. I'd be very glad to get it for you," said the telegraph man, starting for the stairway immediately, in his anxious effort to oblige.

"Oh, no you don't," said the stranger.

The telegraph man didn't.

"Ain't there any other way to get that paper up here?" asked the former, with a meaning flourish of his revolver.

"Well — yes — there is. They can send it up by the pneumatic tube in the news room, I guess," admitted the editor.

This idea being satisfactory, an adjournment was made to the news room and the paper was called for down the speaking-tube. It came up immediately, fresh and warm from the press.

"Supposing," said the telegraph man to himself, with horror, "that correction doesn't satisfy him now."

But, fortunately, the contributor was very much satisfied with his appearance in print. He read it over himself first, and then invited the telegraph man to read it aloud in order that he might get the general effect. The telegraph man's elocution wasn't very artistic; in fact, he found some difficulty in reading at all, but apparently it delighted the stranger, for he encored continually. Indeed, the telegraph man had floundered through this bit of unique journalism a dozen times, and could hardly wag his tongue, when his guest was finally satiated.

"Well, I guess that'll do," he said at last. Then, having instructed the telegraph man that he needn't venture out of the news room before 7 A. M., unless he were anxious to be filled full of holes, he left with a final dramatic flourish of the revolver.

The last the telegraph man saw of him he was striding majestically out of the news room door, waving his paper in one hand and his gun in the other, with the proud air of a man whose mission in life was accomplished.

What the telegraph man said when he was found by the janitor late that morning will never be put into print.

And the managing editor, when he opened his paper at the breakfast table — well, what do you think the managing editor said?

The Luck of Killing Day.

BY McPHERSON FRASER.

THE three companies of the Ninth Cavalry, ordered up from Laramie with gilded records for minstrelsy and savage skirmishes to help form the headquarters of the Department of the Platte at Fort Niobrara, were dismounting in front of their new 'dobe quarters between H Company and the Sutler's store. They had been in the saddle almost continuously for ten days, and were sore of limb and a little ugly in spirit.

The Adjutant's niece, who had pulled up her pony in the rear of the guard-house, fifty yards distant, was contemplating them attentively. She had never experienced colored regulars before. Her six months' career on the western frontier, excepting a few days with a March blizzard at Boisé City, Idaho, lay entirely at Niobrara, whither she came from the arms of her parents in Chicago. They had sent her with tearful reluctance away out to the Post-Adjutant's wife, to forget Chopin and Schubert, and five o'clocks, and small gossip for awhile — to "get out of the conventional," they told their neighbors. And while she sat there straight on her pony, and heard the troops swearing softly over hot August sand-winds in May, and whistling jigs to keep their teeth from gritting, she believed she must be fulfilling her mission with great credit.

The two youngest lieutenants of the Ninth, easing the wet girths on their horses, were eyeing her hard. They hadn't looked on a pretty woman for more than eighteen months, and had almost given up hope; therefore, though this one seemed to pay no special heed to their glances, she impressed them considerably. On the ride down to the stables, while the girl was cantering home, they admitted as much to one another. And because they had come out of West Point arm in arm, their admissions meant a great deal more than you might suppose they would.

On the third day in barracks, after they had unpacked their boxes and chosen the most comfortable room in quarters to shave in, they called together to pay their respects to the Post Adjutant, smoked his Perfecto cigars, and returned to their own rocking-chairs and pipes to swap epigrams on the stately loveliness of his niece. The girl took possession of their heads very suddenly, you see, which was natural and excusable under the circumstances. And she occupied them with varying increments of tenacity until one afternoon, two weeks later, in the cobwebbed cellar of the Post Hall. They were rummaging in the corner used as the dressing-room for the Post theatricals.

"Well, what if she is indifferent and pious? A little religion in proper doses wouldn't hurt me at all. And consider her looks; she may not be a fac-simile of the Venus of Milo, but the resemblance is close enough to suit me. I took particular care to study her last night," said the younger of the two youngest lieutenants from his perch on an old gun-rack. His name was John Sterling Mix, and his hair was blonde.

"Moon-talk," said Sandham, discovering a hand mirror in a battered leathered trunk. "It's time you quit studying women, Mixie; you're too young to understand them. Why don't you learn to talk Sioux, which is profitable in this country? Something is going to break loose on the Reservation pretty soon, and you'll be up a tree for an interpreter. I haven't the slightest doubt that the girl is lovable and good to look at; but I shouldn't go much farther than calling her by her last name. Hello! What's this nasty stuff in the pill boxes? Looks like salve."

Doris Sandham — he was entered in the register as "Lieut, D. Com., 9th Cav." — had got his fingers in some of the grease-paint, and powder, and burnt cork left over from the last Fool's Day Performance. He daubed a little rouge on the end of his nose and squinted at the cavalier on the gun-rack, who grinned and began to count off the finer virtues of the girl.

"If you don't let up, Mixie," Sandham shouted, "I'll be obliged to smear you with this rouge. It will do you less harm than the color on the cheeks of the adjutant's niece."

Mix glowered for a moment, while his brain evolved an outlandish idea. Then he said: —

"Dorrie, I will make you a proposition. I understand they have a Killing Day on the Reservation every week — like our Bloody Tuesday in the Territory. There's one next Saturday, and some of the people are going over with the Colonel in the ambulance. Now suppose we get out our leggins, and borrow a shirt and ride in with the Indians. We can give those skunk-eaters a few pointers on punching. Come, boy, what do you think? There's your grease-paint — see if you can find any burnt umber in that trunk — yes, there's enough to paint a house. Think of the sport."

"I think," Sandham answered, eyeing him quizzically, "that you are one of the most ingenious fools I ev— "

"Wait," Mix interrupted; "I'm looking for sport, but I'll make it an object for you — in dead earnest. If you kill first, I agree to quit talking about the girl, but of course I may call on her as often as she pleases. If I kill — "

"I accept the proposition, Mixie," cried Sandham, "with absolutely no ill feeling. The Sutler will drive us over, and we can make some kind of a deal about dressing at the Reservation. You are not only an ingenious fool but a daredevil. Come along home. It's dinner time."

On Saturday, about an hour after guard-mount, the two youngest lieutenants got into a double-seated buckboard in front of the Sutler's store with a bundle that contained a small hand mirror and three boxes of burnt umber; then the pudgy little Sutler climbed in with a box of Long Pine Havanas and touched his whip to the nigh mule. The six-mule Post ambulance — which was used on all occasions as a stage-coach — had gone on half an hour before with a distinguished and expectant party. By the time the buckboard was out of sight of the Post and across the Niobrara ford, the two youngest and the Sutler were chatting merrily over their cigars.

"Oh, yes," the Sutler was saying, "we manage to take things as they are up here and keep in decent spirits. The minstrel show, and the hops, and the dinners at the Colonel's and the doctor's kind of make up for the bad winter months and the sand-fleas. Of course, it's the same doggonit old story, week in and week out. Until you people came, we hadn't a new arrival for

more'n two years, exceptin' Indians and the Paymaster — and Miss Corliss, the Adjutant's niece. I reckon you've met her? Well, she come out last November, green and somewhat shy for this part of the United States. The doctor's daughter is the only other girl we have, and she's at school in Boston. When she comes home the two girls ought to make a pair worth your while, I tell you."

The Sutler twisted his mouth into a smile. Mix bit the end off a fresh cigar, and asked if Miss Corliss had ever enjoyed a Killing Day.

"She hasn't even seen one, sir. She bought some smelling-salts at the store yesterday. Stylish girl? She is that. I dunno of any handsomer this side of Omaha, 'pon my socks I don't, exceptin' the doctor's daughter; and we've kind o' got used to puttin' *her* first. We can't somehow get over it."

So the talk ran while the buckboard jolted easily over the lumpy, springy, buffalo grass of the level prairie. Whenever the Sutler flagged a little on Miss Corliss, Mix promptly reminded him, and was in turn reminded by a nudge from Sandham, who found difficulty in squeezing in an occasional question on the condition of the Reservation and the possibility of a war-dance. By the time Mix had extracted a bookful on the Adjutant's niece, the buckboard was in sight of Spotted Tail Reservation.

"We'll drive over to Black Wing's log house," the Sutler said. "You can dress there while I hunt up a couple of ponies. I s'pose you'll want 'em fast, and don't mind a little of the devil — but look out if they have sore backs. I dunno, maybe Black Wing himself is goin' to kill to-day. He usually does when there's company from the Post."

By two o'clock the long, thin processions of bucks and squaws which had been stringing out from the four corners of the Reservation were gathered around the fence of Black Wing's corral. The dusky heads capped the pointed birch slabs as if they were spiked. Excepting the monotonous mumbling of three thousand guttural voices, the crowd was remarkably quiet. Some of it was squatting indolently on sleepy ponies, but most of it was afoot in yellow, and gray, and red blankets, and ill-fitting cutaway coats and buckskin breeches, and cast-off cavalry raiment. Against the

fence, near the long bar gate, the Post ambulance was drawn up, and on top of it, in camp-chairs, under red and white parasols, sat the Colonel and his wife, and the Post Adjutant and Mrs. Urquart, the Sutler's wife — and a black-eyed girl, under a big leghorn hat. She looked down with studious tranquillity along the rows of ugly faces turned toward her, or watched the dozen steers that were grazing lazily in the center of the corral. She was getting some more of that experience which her parents had told her would be "unconventional," and already she was thinking how much of it she would send them on grayish-blue paper in a small square envelope that very night, not forgetting to mention the strong smell of Indian that was everywhere in the air.

Presently the mumbling along the fence grew louder, and as the bar gate was slowly shoved open and six bucks rode in bareback at a lope, it swelled into lusty shouting. Two of the riders, in tight, beaded buckskins and flannel shirts, wore red calico on their heads and toed in. Another, the brawniest of the batch, had three speckled feathers in his hair and sat his pony as if he were posing for a photograph. That was Black Wing.

According to custom, the riders swung to the right and cantered down around the corral and back to the gate, waking up the herd and saluting the party on the ambulance with waving of hands, amidst prolonged howling from the throats along the fence. Then there was a lull, which fell to dead silence while Black Wing raised his broad bowie as high as he could reach, uttered a piercing coyote cry, and charged into the herd. He bore down on the beast with the longest horns and dealt it a swooping, savage, crunching blow behind the shoulder with all his might, then drew back a little, brandished his dripping knife, and sprang in again.

The show had now begun. A mighty hurrah went up from the crowd along the fence as all the riders closed in for the fight and slaughter; and while they punched and slashed on left and right, and spattered themselves with hot blood, the applause broke into frantic screeching, and the three thousand spectators jumped up and down and waved their hands, and dug their dirty nails into the fence for joy.

Two steers dropped on their knees and toppled over. The crazy herd seemed to understand, and made a furious dash for the

lower end of the corral, came together, hugged the fence, and stampeded in sheer terror, with the ponies on a run at their clattering heels in a cloud of dust. If you have never seen bleeding Texas cattle stampede, with their long-horned heads shaking frantically close to the ground, and their big eyes glistening, there is at least one kind of excitement you haven't experienced. The herd was rounding past the gate, well bunched, when suddenly there went up from along the fence a yell that split the air. One of the bucks with red calico on his head had been pitched from his pony. Sandham had warned Mix that his ticklish pony might throw him; and when he saw the boy lying at the lower end of the corral in a heap, motionless, with the frenzied herd aimed straight at him, he grew a little pale under his grease paint. As he swung away from the bucks and kicked his pony into a dead run, the crowd quit screeching, and with jaws set watched him race to beat the plunging herd. At seventy-five yards he passed it. Six lengths farther he threw himself full length half off his pony's back, swooped out and down, snatched a handful of slack in the back of Mix's shirt, and took up the race again, lugging one hundred and fifty-five pounds of limp helplessness. It was a magnificent showing of skill and nerve, and the crowd said so at once with an outburst of shrieking that increased to a panic when it realized that both bucks were white men. Sandham's shirt was ripped to his waist, and Mix's blonde head was bare, to say nothing of the plaster of sand and grass on his face where the paint wasn't rubbed off. The willing little beast that bore them was badly frightened, and Sandham couldn't stop him until some time after Mix had been dropped in a lump near the ambulance.

The boy was unconscious. He was a hard-looking case, lying there flat on his back, with clenched fists. The Colonel felt him all over, swearing violently, and said that his left leg was broken below the knee. They turned the seats over in the ambulance, and laid him out on the rubber mattress, with the Sutler's wife's shawl for a pillow. When he came to his senses Miss Corliss was wiping his face with one hand, and holding a bottle of smelling-salts to his nose with the other.

"You're a good creature," he said, weakly. "Where are we? Where's Dorrie?"

"He's on the box with the driver," Miss Corliss answered. There was a slight quivering in her voice. "He said that I would know best how to take care of you. We are about half way to the Post, I should think."

There was a look of surprise on the face of the sentry at the guard-house as the Colonel and his party rode into the Post in the Sutler's buckboard, behind a pair of steaming mules. And by the time the Post surgeon had a bed ready at the hospital, and the ambulance had arrived, everybody knew the story and accounted Sandham a hero. In the mess-room of D Company, he was voted fit for a brevet captaincy, and Miss Corliss and her smelling-salts were unanimously recommended for the Red Cross.

After twenty days the Post surgeon gave Mix permission to be carried out on the hospital veranda. During the long, balmy June evenings, when the big moon shimmered down across the parade-ground, Sandham used to sit beside him in the shadow, and they would listen to the banjo ditties that floated up the hill from the barracks of the Ninth.

One evening Mix was dwelling at length on the excellencies of the girl, and wound up so: —

"Do you know, Dorrie," he said, "I really like that girl. What would you say if — well — if I should take three months' leave and marry her?"

"I shouldn't think much of the girl," Sandham answered. "I found out to-day that she was engaged."

Mix eased his leg a little and exclaimed: —

"The devil, you say!"

"Fact," said Sandham. "She's engaged to me."